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SUBJECT: PERSPECTIVES ON NDI IN ALGERIA

REF: ALGIERS 983

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Thomas F. Daughton;
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) In conversations June 9 and 10 with DRL DAS Erica Barks-Ruggles, a cross-section of Algerian officials and civil society discussed the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and its work in Algeria. Farouk Ksentini, president of the Algerian government's National Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, said that NDI should return to Algeria. Kamel Rezag-Bara, Counselor to the President for Counterterrorism, took a very different view. He started by saying the U.S. could assist Algeria in developing its human rights institutions. Asked if such assistance could include the return of NDI, Rezag-Bara responded cryptically, "Don't think that one specific problem will last forever. There are other organizations that work here. There are other subjects besides elections." When pressed, Rezag-Bara said he thought "there are other issues on which NDI could work." In particular, he noted that work with civil society and women's groups would be a good starting point.

12. (C) Nadia Ait Zai, speaking for the NGO CIDDEF, a MEPI Small Grant recipient, indicated that she had participated in an NDI program that worked on increasing the number of women in parliament. Over dinner, parliament members indicated they had participated in various NDI programs as well. When confronted with the fact that NDI activity had been shut down by the GOA since the fall of 2006, the MPs had no response. However, in a July 2 meeting with the Ambassador (reftel), National Assembly President Abdelaziz Ziari expressed a willingness for the type of support offered by NDI programs to continue, and promised to look into facilitating the visa issue that had brought the programs to a halt.

13. (C) COMMENT: Attempts by foreign interests to enlarge Algeria's political space are generally met with silence and paranoia. Because of this, GOA views on NDI remain somewhat schizophrenic. Over the past year in sidebar conversations, many officials have praised the organization and voiced a desire to see it return. Officially, the GOA continues to be reticent, if not rigid, regarding its return. Given that the GOA is also aware that it must do something to enfranchise and employ the 72 percent of the population under the age of 30, a shared interest for NDI-type programs does exist. However, the GOA has repeatedly indicated that such steps must be slow and deliberate Algerian steps, with any foreign assistance seen as a hot potato, albeit an attractive one.

14. (U) This cable has been cleared by DAS Barks-Ruggles.
DAUGHTON